How to Use the Solution-Focused Approach to Enhance Trauma-Sensitive Practices in Schools

Dr. Carol E. Buchholz Holland, NCC

North Dakota State University
Counselor Education Program
Fargo, North Dakota

Objectives

- Learn how the Solution-Focused approach can be used to enhance trauma-sensitive practices.

- Gather Solution-Focused tools that can be used in a variety of settings.

Goals of Trauma-Sensitive Schools

1) **To foster a safe, positive, healthy, and inclusive WHOLE-SCHOOL learning environment that enables students to:**
- Develop positive relationships with adults and peers
- Regulate their emotions and behavior
- Achieve academic and non-academic success in school
- Maintain physical and psychological health and well-being

2) **To integrate services and align initiatives that PROMOTE:**
- students' mental & behavioral health (including social and emotional learning)
- bullying prevention
- trauma sensitivity
- dropout prevention, truancy reduction, and positive behavioral approaches that reduce suspensions and expulsions
- foster care and homeless youth education

(adapted from https://traumasensitiveschools.org/)

Solution-Focused Approach

- Insoo Kim Berg & Steve de Shazer developed the **Solution-Focused Approach** in the early 80s with help from their colleagues.

- Solution-focused approach was originally designed to work with individuals and families who had multiple problems and were hard to reach. This approach is **adaptable** and has since been used in multiple non-clinical settings such as education, medicine, and business.

- Solution-focused approach was developed using linguistics theory. *(It is very important to consider how we word things.)*

- "Instead of *problem solving*, we shift the **focus** to **solution-building**. Which sounds like a play on words, but it's a profoundly different paradigm." *Insoo Kim Berg*

Why Use Solution-Focused Approach?

- This approach is strength-based and evidence-based. Because it focuses on strengths, it energizes people.

- It is goal-directed, and it offers a set of clear and simple intervention methods that focus on making changes in perception, behavior, and social environment of people.

- It can yield *rapid* and *enduring* change, and a high degree of satisfaction. It also helps build **relationships** and **HOPE**.


Provides Common Language

- Solution-Focused approach provides a **common strength-based language** that can be used both in and outside of a counseling session in several settings and by a variety of stakeholders (students, parents/guardians, mental health professionals, teachers, administrators, staff).

- In other words, more work can take place at a faster pace because it can be applied in real life settings outside of a counseling session.

Applications in Schools

In addition to using the solution-focused approach in **Individual Counseling**, it can be used in:

- **Classroom management**
- **Consultation**
- **Peer mediation**
- **Parent/teacher conferences**
- **Small group counseling**
- **School climate improvement**
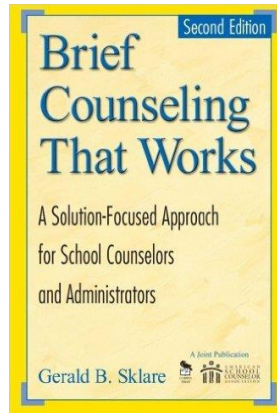
Second Edition

Brief Counseling That Works

A Solution-Focused Approach for School Counselors and Administrators

Gerald B. Sklare

Brief Counseling That Works: A Solution-Focused Approach for School Counselors and Administrators (2nd Edition)

By Gerald Sklare

Key Assumptions of the Solution-Focused Approach

1. **If it isn't broke, don't fix it. If it works, do more of it. If it doesn't work, do something different.**
2. Every person is unique, resourceful, and capable of changing.
3. People are experts on their own lives. Their own goals drive the activities.
4. Everybody is invested in solutions they generate.
5. No problem is constant.
6. Big problems do not always require big solutions. (Murphy, 2008)

Focus is on the Present & Future

Trying to understand the past *(which you can't change)* can be overwhelming to many people & some may use it as a ***scapegoat*** to inhibit personal growth or take responsibility. (Sklare, 2005)

Do You Want to Drive Your Life Using Your Rear View Mirror or Your Front Windshield? (Jacobs & Schimmel, 2013)

"There is nothing wrong at looking at the past. I just need to learn not to stare." *~Anonymous*

The nature of **trauma** is that it can cause feelings of **disconnection** from the school community that undermine students' success.

As a result, it is important to connect with the PERSON

- not the problem.
-Insoo Kim Berg

We don't want to label people such as the "*troubled kids*".

Stimuli that enters the brain reaches the Amygdala ("emotional brain") in the Limbic System faster than it reaches the Frontal Cortex (*decision-making, self-control*).

Frontal Cortex: decision-making, self-control

Limbic System: learning, emotions (Amygdala)
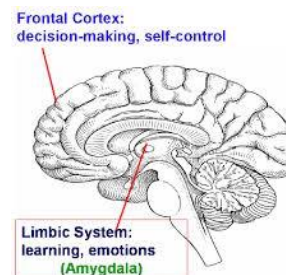
"AMYGDALA HIJACKING"

- When you focus on **problems**, you are more likely to activate **negative emotions** connected with those problems that are located in the brain's limbic system (where the amygdala is).

- In addition, the more **negative *emotional connections*** you make in your brain, the **less dopamine** neurotransmitter you create and the fewer resources you have for solving future problems.

- If the amygdala in the limbic system is **overstimulated** by **negative triggers**, an "**AMYGDALA HIJACK**" may occur.

- This takes place when the **Amygdala** (the "emotional brain") overcomes the **Frontal Cortex** (the "thinking brain") and causes a person to react irrationally or "**without thinking**".

Benefits of Focusing on Solutions

- Focusing on solutions generates a "**toward**" state because you are **seeking** something you want, not avoiding something.

- The "**toward**" state **increases** dopamine levels (which is useful for insight). *(Promotion)*

- If you are expecting you might find a solution, your ***positive expectations*** help release even more ***dopamine***.

Comparing **Problem-Solving** Schools to **Solution-Focused** Schools

Problem-Solving	**vs. Solution-Focused**
• Emphasis on **past**	• Focus on the **future**
• **Problem**-talk	• **Solution**-talk
• Attention on what is **wrong**	• Attention on what is **working**
• Student is **flawed ("Deficit" model)**	• Student is **capable ("Strengths" model)**

Comparing **Problem-Solving** Schools to **Solution-Focused** Schools cont.

Problem-Solving	**Solution-Focused**
• "**Why** did you do that?"	• "**How** did you do that?"
• **Administrator/Teacher** is source of solution	• **Student** is source of solution
• Counselor/Teacher accepts responsibility for fixing the problem	• Frees Counselor/Teacher from responsibility of "fixing" the problem

---

Focus on Improving School Climate

- Instead of focusing on **preventing** the **problem of bullying**, solution-focused counselors and educators focus on **promoting** positive school climate and developing students' assets.

- Why focus on something (ex. bullying) we don't want to see? Let's focus **more** on what we **want** to see.

- Refer to Sue Young's work in England
http://www.spoe.nl/media/attachments/pesten-past-niet-lezing-1-sue-young_1_.pdf

---

Gonzalo Garza Independence High School:
A **Solution Building** School in Action

Austin, Texas, USA

http://garzaindependencehs.weebly.com/about-us.html

Recent Gonzalo Garza H.S. Stats

Overall Dropout rate: <u>4.8%</u>

Dropout rate for white students: 3.7%
Dropout rate for black students: 0%
Dropout rate for Hispanic students: 9.8%

School Enrollment: 374

White students:	44.1%	**US average**
Black students:	18.2%	**graduation rate**
Hispanic students:	36.6%	**is 81%**
Asian students:	0.8%	
Native American students:	0.3%	

http://www.schools-data.com/schools/GONZALO-GARZA-INDEPENDENCE-H-S-AUSTIN.html

---

Characteristics of Solution-Focused Approach School (A.K.A. "Solution-Building" School)

1. Faculty emphasis on building students' strengths
2. Attention given to individual relationships and progress of the students
3. Emphasis on the students' choices and personal responsibility
4. Overall commitment to achievement and hard work
5. Focus on students' future success instead of past difficulties
6. Celebration of **small** steps toward success
7. Reliance on goal-setting activities

(Franklin, Streeter, Kim, and Tripodi, 2007, p. 135)

WOWW Training Manuals

Berg, I. K., & Shilts, L. (2004). *Classroom solutions: WOWW approach*. Milwaukee, WI: Brief Family Therapy Center.

Berg, I. K., & Shilts, L. (2005). *Classroom solutions: WOWW coaching*. Milwaukee, WI: Brief Family Therapy Center.

Books can be ordered from:
http://www.sfbta.org/SFBT_book_store.html

"Not Knowing" Skills (Be respectfully curious!)

- Accept what the person wants as valid and reasonable:

  "**You must have a very good reason for** (…). Tell me more about it. "

- "How is this problem for you?" *(Don't make assumptions about the issue.)*

- "When things are different, what will you be **doing** that you are not doing now?" (Insoo Kim Berg, 2002)

SF Goal Setting Question

- Establishing and verbalizing goals is important because it provides the foundation for the entire solution-focused process.

- The <u>identification of a clear goal</u> is the **best** predictor of effective outcomes.

Ex. "When things are going better, what will you be doing differently?"
(Make it a "<u>TOWARD</u>" goal, not an "AVOID" goal.)

The Miracle Question (or "Really awesome" day question)

The **Miracle Question** helps to:
- Set goals
- Start talking about situations after solution
- Develop solutions separate from the problem
- Explore new possibilities

The Miracle Question
(or "Really Awesome" Day or "Future Perfect")

"Imagine tonight while you are sleeping a miracle occurs and this miracle solves the problem you told me about today."

"Since you were sleeping when the miracle occurred, what is the first small thing that you will notice the next morning when you wake up which will tell you this miracle has happened (and what else, etc., etc.)?"

"What will **you** be doing or what will you notice that is different to tell you that this miracle has occurred?"
"What will *other people* notice you **doing**?"
*** Make sure to focus on details. (Cottrell, 2000)

Preferred Future Question

Invites person to describe how he/she wants the situation to become.

• "How do you want your situation to become?"

• "What would you like instead of the problem?"

• "How will you notice things will have become better?"

Scaling Questions

• Used to assess goals, progress, or motivation to change or take action.

• They encourage a sense of moving forward (even if the score is 0).

• Use a scale from 1 to 10 & design the scale with the person ("1" being____, "10" being ___)

1. "What tells you that you are at a '6'?"

2. "How is '6' different for you than a '5'?"

3. "What would others (family, friend, etc.) say where you are at on the same scale?"

4. "What would it take to move it up 1 point higher on the same scale?"
          ("What would you be doing differently?")

Exception-Seeking Question

The intensity of problems fluctuates constantly.

Exceptions are circumstances when the problem did not occur, or occurred with less frequency or intensity. They are used to help people discover solutions.   (Gillen, 2004)

"Are there times when the things are **a little** better?"

Cory's 1st Quarter Grades

Algebra I	F
Physical Science	D
English 9	F
Physical Education 9	B-
Early Civilizations	F
Drawing I	C+
Spanish 1	C-

Where do you first want to focus your attention?

Examples of Exception-Seeking Questions to Ask a Student

"I see that you passed **4** out of your 7 classes."

"**What** is different about these 4 classes?

"**How** did you manage to pass those 4 classes?"
(or "**What** did you do?")

"**What** would your teachers say you did that worked for you?"

"**What** did the teachers do that **worked** for you?"
(Metcalf, 1995, p. 48)

Examples of Exception-Seeking Questions to Ask a Teacher

"**When** was the last time you did notice Cory sitting still in his seat (*even for a short time*)?"

"**What** was going on in class at the time?"

"**Where** was he sitting?"

"**Who** was there?" (Metcalf, 1995, p. 48)

Past Success Question

By asking this question, the person may remember when he/she has already been able to cope with a problem or solve it.

• "When have things been a little bit better?"

• "Have you ever been able to solve a similar problem before?"

• "What has helped you in the past to deal with this situation?"

Solution-Focused Tool Box

1. "Not knowing" skills
2. SF goal setting question
3. The Miracle question
4. Preferred future question
5. Scaling question
6. Exception-seeking question
7. Past success question

How to be the "Wise Person"

• "The wise person is not the person who provides the right answers, but the one who **asks** the **right questions**."

(adapted from a Claude Levi-Strauss quote)

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Dr. Carol E. Buchholz Holland
North Dakota State University
Counselor Education Program
1919 N. University Dr., Suite C
Fargo, North Dakota, USA 58102
(701) 231-7103   (OFFICE)

Carol.E.Buchholz@ndsu.edu